## DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

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## ANDRUS ASKS CONGRESS TO ACT QUICKLY ON ALASKA LANDS LEGISLATION

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus today urged the Congress to act quickly to complete its unfinished business and establish new national parks, wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers and forest areas in Alaska.

"The promise of the Alaska lands legislation held out to the American people has always been that whole ecosystems would be preserved, that the land management errors of the lower 48 states would not be repeated," Andrus told the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee.

Andrus urged the Committee to scrutinize weakening amendments being proposed to the legislation. "The burden of proof must rest with those who want to use the federal lands for private economic gain to demonstrate the need--beyond any question--for weakening amendments," he said.

"I urge each member of this Committee to inquire beyond the irresponsible charges of 'lockup' and determine for himself which individual or which company will profit from a particular amendment, and ask the question, is there an alternative," Andrus said.

"For a miner or a trophy guide or a timber company, there are alternatives. For the brown bear, the caribou and for all the people who depend on these resources, there are no alternatives," he said.

Congress began intensive consideration of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1977. At that time, Andrus stated that passage of the legislation was the Carter Administration's highest environmental priority and urged Congress to protect the "crown jewels" of Alaska--its most spectacular natural environments, recreation areas and wildlife habitats.

After overwhelmingly passing the House, the legislation died in the Senate. Because the protective land withdrawals expired on December 16, 1978, in November Andrus used his authority to withdraw for three years all the lands being considered for designation as conservation units by Congress some 110 million acres. On December first, the President designated some 56 million acres of these areas as 17 national monuments, a permanent form of protection.

"I would point out that it was delaying tactics that were responsible for Congress not passing the bill last year and that ultimately forced the Administration to take executive action," Andrus said. "I hope you will not heed the calls for delay."

Andrus pointed out to the Committee that the 13 national monuments administered by the Park Service are closed to sport hunting and will remain closed unless they are redesignated by Congress as national preserves. Preserves are managed with the same strict regulations as national parks, except they are open to sport hunting. Hunting season in Alaska begins in late summer.

He recommended that some of the national monuments be redesignated as preserves but added that he would support this designation only if other uses, such as mineral development, "incompatible with the protection of these outstanding resources" are prohibited.

In the Wrangell-St. Elias area--often described as the mountain kingdom of North America--Andrus recommended that an area with approximately 47 percent of the Dall sheep be opened to sport hunters, and the remainder kept in park status. This proposal would open up more of the area to hunting than Andrus' 1977 proposal, but would still keep some accessible areas closed to hunting so that park visitors could see these magnificent animals in their natural setting.

The Administration's recommendations are similar to its earlier proposal for 13 national parks, 14 national wildlife refuges and 33 additions to the wild and scenic rivers system. A new proposal is designation of a refuge on the Alaska Peninsula. In 1977, a land status study was proposed for this area, but since then land ownership patterns have been clarified and refuge designation is now recommended.

The Administration's new recommendations would add 98.9 million acres of federal lands to the national conservation systems. Of these, 43.3 million would be units of the national park system, 49.9 million would be wildlife refuges, 3.3 million in additions to existing national forests, and 2.3 million in wild and scenic rivers.

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